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Inside this Issue

Andy Erwin

In this issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* we will be reflecting on the redemption made possible by the death of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ separates the Christian religion from all the other religions of men. No other religion has a cross in it!

We can never truthfully and fully know Jesus until and unless we know Him as the crucified Savior of the world. Moreover, we will never reach our full potential toward God and toward man without understanding the cross. Such a lack of understanding is at the heart of many of society's ongoing problems.

We are also saddened by the untimely passing of a dear friend and brother, Al Franks. You will find a tribute to brother Al in this issue. You will also find a reprint of a tribute to R.W. Comer. Brother Comer continues to bless churches through the Comer Trust, which is to be distributed among churches of Christ in Tennessee and Kentucky.

Hugh Fulford has also written an article asking the question, "Why do liberals stay among us?" You will find articles which encourage you to be obedient to Christ's commandments, to be converted to Christ, and an article covering the theme of shepherding in the Old Testament. Our prayer is that this issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* will be a great benefit to you as you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

What Does the Cross Mean to Me?

Elliott Hamm

What does the cross mean to me? When I ask myself the question, I'm reminded of the word *purpose*. Often, we hear individuals in society discuss the need to find their "purpose in life." What exactly does this entail? Are they searching for material things? Most importantly, where are they looking for guidance to define their purpose? Are they searching the Scriptures?

When I think of our purpose, I immediately think of Ecclesiastes 12: 13, "Fear God, and keep his commandments." As Christians, how do we answer the question regarding our purpose? Does it involve the cross?

"What does the cross mean to me?" For myself, I think of Jesus and Jesus' purpose. If we recall, Jesus tells us in Luke 19: 10 that His purpose is to "seek and to save that which was lost." Are we striving to follow in the steps of Jesus? Are we trying to *save the lost*? We have been commanded as much (Mark 16: 15).

Let us use the example of Jesus on the cross. It was from the cross that Jesus spoke His last words as a mortal man. In Luke 23: 23 – 49, we have the account of His crucifixion and death. We can read of Jesus being forgiving. In verse 23 He said,

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We can read of Jesus telling one of the thieves with Him, "Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Amidst His own suffering, He was describing *salvation*.

We can read of Jesus anticipating His death and being confident when He said in verse 46, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." These powerful words spoken on the cross still resonate with us today. Jesus was confident in His mission being accomplished. He came to do His Father's will (John 6: 38) and endured the cross. Such forgiveness, salvation, and confidence help us to see Jesus' purpose and give us insight into our purpose.

When considering the meaning of the cross and Jesus, we cannot forget another important part, which is His death. But, what does His death signify? Before we can answer this, we need to clarify several facts. First, we must understand that His death was not an accident or a mistake. It was divinely determined. It was predestined, foreordained, and was God's plan. His plan was revealed through the Old Testament prophets. Secondly, we know that Jesus' death

is proof that God loves us (John 3: 16). Thirdly, Jesus even spoke of His forthcoming death, as recorded in John 12: 27 – 35. More specifically, this is discussed in verse 32 when Jesus says, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” Jesus even went as far to explain His death in John 16: 25 – 33. Verse 33 explains that He overcame the world. What does Jesus’ death signify? His death signifies *victory* (Luke 19: 30).

A logical and thought-provoking question is, “What does Christ’s death mean to you?” When I think of Jesus’ death, I think of the opportunity for the salvation that we have been offered (Luke 19: 10). I think of His power to deliver us from the world (Galatians 1: 4).

The Bible reveals to us what Christ’s death should mean to us; it shows us the significance. It is evident that Paul sees significance in the death of Christ. In Philippians 2: 8, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

The significance is not just that Jesus died, but how He died, “even the death of the cross.” Paul is teaching humility of the heart. Christ’s death was a showing of humility. Peter writes, in 1 Peter 2: 24, that “by whose stripes ye were healed.” When I read and study that passage, I see clearly that Jesus’ death was a

recompensing death. Through His death, we have *atonement for sins*.

When thinking about Christ’s death, let us look at the course of his death. It was cruel. Crucifixion was a cruel method of execution. Under Roman law, this form of execution was reserved for those condemned of murder, theft, and insurrection. For the Jews, this method of death was fitting for a blasphemer, which Jesus was accused, because of His being the Son of God (Luke 22: 66 – 71). Jesus’ death was intended to touch our hearts. It should touch our hearts not only emotionally, but spiritually.

As we reflect on our original question regarding the meaning of the cross, we can see the answer to this question is rather difficult to simplify. It is a question that also requires us to be reminded that our purpose in this life is to share God’s word with others so that we can live for Him.

We are also reminded that serving God may not always be easy. Jesus suffered a cruel death on the cross to save us from sin. Despite obstacles that may come our way, our victory is our eternal resting place with God in Heaven.

By our answer, the cross means purpose, saving the lost, salvation, victory, and atonement for sins. Now the question remains, what does the cross mean to you?

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Ronald Bryant

In its physical essence there is nothing attractive or appealing about the crucifixion of Jesus. Physically, there is nothing in it that inspires lofty thought or adoration. The incredible horror of His violent death is enough to force any normal person to turn away from that scene. The suffering, the blood, and shame of execution is set forth in horrific detail. To add to it the place, the hostility, the violence, the terror, and the despair of the few disciples who stood at a distance to observe what was taking place, is to be drawn into their despair.

Admittedly, the death of Christ on the hill of Golgotha (the place of the skull), is the most famous death in all of history. Through the years, artists have tried to depict that event in detail. Not surprisingly, a death on a cross on a hill that is part of a garbage dump is not, nor can it ever be a thing of beauty. In the same vein, a caricature of a man's body on a "crucifix" is but a misrepresentation of the real event. Additionally, a cross as a piece of jewelry may proclaim a message, but who can really state what that message is?

Biblical truth alone transforms and elevates thought regarding the cross. The "why" of the cross is established by the Lord God of heaven in His inspired word. The whole of the Bible is necessary to an understanding

of the place, the purpose, and the significance of the cross. The words of men will never be adequate to the task.

The death of Christ is undeniably a historical fact. It is not a religious story or human theory. The facts supplied in Scripture stand above and beyond the thoughts and the imagination of men. These facts are supported by the testimony of many witnesses, and even by the critics. Among the many witnesses are the writers of the books of the New Testament, and those who proclaimed Christ as is recorded in the book of Acts. The critics inadvertently supply evidence of Christ, even as they deny Him. (How many non-entities are identified and opposed by scholars?)

The reality is that the death of Christ on the cross stands as the center-point of history, and of the Scriptures. The Old Testament sets forth specific promises and prophecies about the birth, the life, the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. One of the greatest and most beneficial studies is the study of the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, and their fulfillment. Another study of tremendous benefit is in taking each book of the New Testament; studying each in turn, noting carefully the statements made by Jesus about His death (the predictions He made),

and then the accounts set forth detailing the event itself. This is a demanding study, for approximately one-fourth to one-third of each of the gospels record the last week of Jesus' life on earth; specifically, the events of the trials, the suffering, His crucifixion, His burial, and His resurrection. Additionally, one can study the sermons recorded in the book of Acts, which center upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The epistles also supply additional details regarding the fact and the purpose of the death of Christ. It is evident that a prayerful and consistent study of each of the sections of the whole Bible is essential.

The Scriptures center upon God's purpose, not on the drama of some events. What Jesus did and said is the focus of the New Testament, and they focus upon the fulfillment of God's promises and prophecies regarding Him. Holy purposes alone transform the events, explain the "Why" of the cross. God's perspective and purpose alone sheds the necessary light upon the cross of Christ. The wisdom of man is not adequate to express its meaning or purpose.

Categorically, the crucifixion stands as a horrific and tragic event. Tragically, Jesus was despised and rejected by His own people. Tragically, He was betrayed by one of His disciples; Judas Iscariot.

Tragically, the religious leaders: the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees plotted to destroy Jesus.

Tragically, Pilate, the Roman governor, although confessing that Jesus was innocent, was intimidated into signing the death sentence demanded by the Jewish leader – in a criminal act he participated in the death of Jesus.

In the face of the tragedy and violence of the crucifixion, there is this undeniable fact: Jesus came to earth, not to live, but to die. He came to give His life as a ransom for all (Mark 10:45; I Timothy 2:6). He repeatedly and consistently declared this fact.

At least seven hundred years before Christ came to the earth, the prophet Isaiah wrote out the details concerning the suffering and death of Christ. He spelled out in clear detail the facts and the purpose of the suffering and the death of Christ. (Read: Isaiah 53:1-12). It was for us!

In Scripture, Christ is revealed as the perfectly sinless Son of God. He is also identified with sinful men. He was spoken of as "the friend of sinners." It is readily apparent that He did not view sinners as unworthy rejects. He sought to serve them and to lead them to life eternal. He looked upon them as oppressed and as ruled by their sins, but not as unworthy of His life.

He, the "good Shepherd" gave His life for the lost (John 10:10-11). He said, "Therefore My Father loves me because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have

power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” (John 10:17-18).

In His death, Jesus clearly identified with sinners. He died between two thieves. His manner of death bore the stigma of a curse (Galatians 3:10-13). He lived His life under the shadow of an ignominious death. He, the perfectly obedient Son of God bore the sins of all mankind and became the sacrifice for sin. He bore our sin and our guilt, but not for any sins of His own. He was never guilty of sin!

As the Son of God, He had perfect fellowship with His Father. That fellowship was not broken except in that moment when He was fully one as a sacrifice for sin. The Father placed on Him the sins of us all. He was in that moment so fully identified with sinful man, that He experienced the horror of separation from His Father. His words reveal the price that He paid (Matthew 27:46). (It is doubted that we will ever fully understand the terror that He knew, in that moment.).

That moment passed and Jesus then declared, “It is finished.” He was not saying, “it is over,” but “it is accomplished.” Heavens purpose was accomplished when Jesus became the sacrifice for sin. The Father was “in Christ” in that moment. Paul stated this clearly, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

It is correct to affirm that Jesus knew there was a price to be paid for the salvation of sinners, and He paid it. He knew that there was a judgment to be faced, and He faced it. He knew there was a penalty to be borne, and He bore it. He knew there was victory to be won, and He won it.

May the Father hasten the day when it is true and each of us can say, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).



The Preaching of the Cross

Andy Robison

The cross was torture and death for disgraced criminals and enemies of the Roman state. The disciples understandably were shaken, therefore, when Jesus said His followers had to take up one to follow Him.

This startling sequence of events recorded is recorded in Matthew 16, Mark 8, and Luke 9. First, upon Jesus' questioning of the disciples, Peter announces their conclusion that He is, indeed, the Christ. The next thing is that Jesus announces the Jewish leaders will kill Him, and He will be raised the third day. Apparently not processing the thought of a resurrection, Peter rebukes Jesus for saying He would be killed. That is when Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan." Peter's thinking was way too worldly.

At that point, Jesus makes the earth-shattering announcement that anyone who would follow Him must take up a cross. Power and palaces would not be the lot of Christ's followers; pain, anguish and sacrifice would be. If I were one of the twelve at that point, I think I would have been flustered, too.

Most of those twelve disciples would catch on after Jesus' resurrection appearances, preach the cross faithfully through many trials, and become martyrs for Christ's cause. What sounded outlandish to them in

Christ's sake had become their own destiny. Whether Christ meant His statement metaphorically (i.e. "You'll have hard times"), or literally ("Some of you will die by crucifixion"), it is believed that many of these disciples experienced both.

People in the world thought them quite foolish for this. They bucked the tide of culture, stubbornly refused religious submission to emperor worship, and upset the balance of pagan-based economies for nothing but pain, anguish, and death for themselves. Who but a fool would do that?

Saul of Tarsus was one who would have thought them foolish. Quite angered that these upstarts were wrecking the religion of his youth, his education, and his adult profession, he retaliated with persecution. He would make sure some of them, at least metaphorically, carried their crosses.

That is, until He saw a light on a trip, heard a voice, and went on into the town of Damascus to hear more about the resurrected Lord. Then, he changed. What was foolishness to him prior became salvation to him in the end. The facts did not change, but his evaluation of them and his attitude toward them surely did. He went from pushing the cross on the saved to preaching the cross to the lost.

He, then, was uniquely qualified to write the Spirit-inspired words, “For the message (preaching—KJV; word—ASV) of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18 NKJV).

The very nature of the Christian religion—taught from early in Jesus’ ministry—was that it would be unpopular and even counter-cultural. To those worldly folks who profess themselves to be wise, but are the real fools (Rom. 1:22), Jesus of Nazareth was nothing more than a rabble-rousing criminal rightly executed by the Roman Empire as a matter of political recourse. They didn’t need trouble and He was causing it, so the powers put Him to death. Why would anybody follow Him? “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...”

Saved people, rather, see honor in humility. The Creator who made the world loved His people—the pinnacle of His creation—enough to allow His only Son to leave the pleasantries of heaven and endure the trials of earth. The Son loved enough to permit false accusations to spur against Him physical abuse ranging from spitting and slapping to ultimate stabbing to release blood and water from the mutilated corpse.

Saved people see and appreciate that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). They appreciate such selfless-

ness and want to emulate it so much as they are called upon to do so. “...To those who are being saved, it is the power of God.”

It’s all in how one looks at the matter, and how one looks at his or her life. Worldly wisdom is about self-advancement, power, money, and prestige. But worldly wisdom, the apostle Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) concluded, was the real foolishness, the ultimate futility. “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor. 1:20). God had destroyed the wisdom of the wise on Old Testament occasions (cf. Isa. 29:14; 1 Cor. 1:19), and He did it again in the cross of Christ.

People might not like it, but God wins. “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:22-24). The Creator knows how His creation operates. It might be corrupted in sin, but He is not. Therefore, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25).

The Creator set forth a creation that was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). When corrupted with sin, the world’s degradation and desperation is only mitigated by those who will practice—against all cultural tides—godliness. “Noah found grace in the

eyes of the Lord,” though colossal judgment came on the rest (Gen. 6:8). He preached righteousness, and the masses would not listen (2 Pet. 2:5). God actively proved Himself right, and the masses foolish.

The world corrupted itself in a vile cesspool of sin and violence (Gen. 6:5, 11). God would not lower Himself to such absence of standards. He is holy, and His holiness would prevail—if only in a few (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

The few, therefore, often call out the most for their misguided ways. Few would find the narrow path, the Savior taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:13,14), but those few would be a light to the world and salt to the earth (Matt. 5:13-16). They would be the ones holding forth the word of life when most were content to walk into the wages of sin—death (Rom. 3:23; 6:21-23). Those who seem unwise in the ways of the masses have been the ones carrying the widely misunderstood and ignored message of true wisdom.

Not many of those high-minded people are called (1 Cor. 1:26). “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor.

1:27-29). Since God’s ways are so unseemly to the world, His victory by those means becomes all the more amazing.

No fleshly being or group thereof can invent a message even close to the humble and glorious, simple and salvific word of the cross. They can continue to think it foolishness, but for that stubbornness, they will someday pay. Those who embrace its simple, even (arguably) counterintuitive wisdom—those who submit and carry their own crosses—will be the ones rewarded with a resurrection likened to the one following that crucifixion at Golgotha (cf. John 5:28-29; 1 John 3:1-3).

Speakers may dazzle audiences with brilliance, endear themselves to listeners with humor, or impress seekers with shallow truisms. Charlatans may tickle itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3). This is worldly wisdom and sophistry.

Contrarily, true evangelists preach the love of Christ and the response of self-sacrifice it demands. This is the preaching of the cross.



Glorying in the Cross

John T. Polk. II

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD [taken from Jeremiah 9:23-24].’” (1 Corinthians 1:27-31)

It seems that it is a normal, worldly attitude to “boast, or brag” about one’s achievements. This problem was rife in the church of Christ at Corinth. Nearly every Christian found something about which to brag/boast/glory, while trying to elevate themselves above others. In other words, to them, “glorying” seemed to be a shortcut to spiritual recognition. Throughout the entire Epistle, the inspired Apostle Paul dealt with this most prevalent problem. It was of major concern then, and is probably even more so today!

Our present society gives ample opportunities for competition that gives one “bragging rights” over oth-

ers. Churches give in to this mania and compete by promotions within the local congregation (“Easter,” “Christmas,” “Mothers,” “Fathers,” “Grandparents,” every special day, except “The Lord’s Day!”) and without (“featured worship entertainment;” “famous speakers;” “awesome recreational activities”).

Before any Christian can boast because he/she is a “Christian,” and therefore to be elevated above all others, Paul reminds us that the “chosen” of God are not those who would impress the worldly: “foolish,” “weak,” “base,” “despised,” “are not.”

A Christian should never expect worldly recognition, acclaim, or elevation just by becoming a Christian. It is only by realizing how low our lives have become (“repenting”) and entering the lowest point of Jesus’ life on earth (“baptized into His death”), that we fully appreciate what it means for God to “raise us to newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4).

We must not boast that we are a Christian, but that Jesus Christ made it possible. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). No one is “free” from sins without Jesus Christ.

Remember the principle “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1

Corinthians 1:29), for no one should brag/glory before God that they have grown spiritually because of: (1) who preached to them (1:10-12; 3:1-11); (2) who baptized them (1:13-17); (3) their prominence before baptism (1:18-29); (4) following after men (1:30-31; 3:18-21); (5) not following Scripture (4:6-16); (6) not needing the Apostle Paul to visit them (4:17-21; 2 Corinthians 10:7-11; 11:16-31); (7) sympathizing with the immoral (5:1-7).

Every problem in the Corinthian church that caused division among them centered on this grasping for recognition. The appeal to them (and us!) was to remind them that their salvation depended entirely upon accepting God's: (1) calling (1:2-10); (2) preaching the message of the cross of Christ (1:17-18, 21; 2:1-5); (3) gift (4:4-7); (4) forgiveness (5:9-13; 6:1-11, 15-20); (5) overcoming temptations (10:1-14); (6) created individual sexual identity (11:2-16); (7) miraculous spiritual gifts (12:1-11); (8) resurrection of Jesus (15:1-20).

All the way through the epistle, Paul reminds us that we would be nothing, have nothing, hope for nothing, if it were not for God! Therefore even "if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Paul even emphasized: "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Christians must realize that, as Jesus has said, "when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).

As a matter of fact, we cannot boast of our future without God. Solomon said: "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). James confirmed this for us today (James 4:13-17).

People boast/brag/glory about themselves when they refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon all that God is, has, and does for them. "Arrogance" is the inflated opinion we get when we look only at our achievements, and not at the help God gives us so that we may accomplish our achievements! Arrogance consumes the minds of: children who do not appreciate what their parents have provided them; politicians who think they, and not God, have sole control over wealth, lands and citizens; and religious leaders who think that religions which appeal to carnal minds and worldly interests, can spiritually elevate anyone!

Even our giving comes from what God has given us: "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And

God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.' [from Psalm 112:9] Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God" (2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

Our jobs simply provide us a means to do more than just support ourselves. "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). Truly, we must "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

Knowing that we must turn ourselves over to Jesus Christ, maybe we can now understand what Paul wrote: "As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has

been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jess neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:12-15).

Anyone who imposes unauthorized "laws" on a Christian may have "bragging rights" as if they have control over that Christian, but what they have done is really "wrong." A Christian must "boast" that only "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" has made the difference in his, or her, life. "God forbid" (may it never be so!) that we would "brag" about what we have done, but, rather, what God has done for, and with, us.

We must conclude with Paul, that "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The "message of the cross" includes the resurrected Jesus' instruction to "every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

Anyone who imposes doctrines and practices that God never authorized in His New Testament is "boasting in your flesh," and that is very wrong! God promises no salvation without faith and before baptism. "But 'he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.' For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the

Lord commends” (2 Corinthians 10:17-18).

Humanly-devised doctrines and practices, such as teaching that sinners are saved by a prayer, or twisting

Scriptures to emphasize the thief on the cross instead of “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) cannot, and have never, saved anyone, for they boast in the flesh.

The Way of the Cross Leads Home

Jimmy Clark

The song “The Way of the Cross Leads Home” begins with the words “I must needs go home by the way of the cross: There’s no other way but this; I shall ne’er get sight of the gates of light If the way of the cross I miss.”

Two passages that are cited with this song are Jesus’ words to the one who wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. “Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21).

The other passage is Peter’s words to the Sanhedrin, where was stated, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus explicitly said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”

(John 14:6). A study of the topic of the cross is vital to a home in heaven. Consequently, one must see that there are two crosses that lead home.

The first cross that leads home is the one Jesus bore for the sins of the world. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross provided the atonement for the world to have access to God. Sin brought separation from God. Isaiah wrote, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2).

James wrote concerning sin, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15).

Someone had to take the place of those who sinned that life might be

possible. Isaiah thus stated, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

Paul wrote, “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. . . . For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:19, 21).

The rule of law demanded that the penalty for sin be executed. Christ having no sin and being both God and man provides the needed substitute for sinful man.

However, the cross of Christ is not the only cross to bear to go home to heaven. Jesus explicitly said to his disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Luke’s account gives further details of this exhortation, where it is written, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23-24).

Taking up one’s cross daily involves the constant sacrifice of life in order to please God. Paul stated of his life in view of the resurrection, “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:30-31). Paul wrote of the motivating power of the cross and the love that was exemplified from it, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Seeing that the cross of Christ motivates the child of God to die unto sin and to live unto the Lord, he then becomes the model for life. Obedience is modeled after him. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

He is the model of humble service. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Out of this comes the conclusion, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my ab-

sence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

The very model of perseverance is in Christ. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye

be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2-3).

Jesus truly said that the way to life involved a gate that was “strait” and a way that was “narrow” with “few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14). Nevertheless, any suffering or affliction as a Christian “worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

BE CONVERTED

Johnny Trail

Conversion is defined as “an experience associated with the definite and decisive adoption of a religion.” (Miriam-Webster) Conversion was mentioned by Jesus at various points during His earthly ministry. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said, “...Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to “be converted” to the extent of one becoming like a little child?

The Greek word used for converted in Matthew 18:3 is στρέφω (strepō) The word means to *turn* quite around or *reverse* (literally or figuratively): to convert, turn (again, back again, self, self about). The person who is converted turns himself around morally speaking. One might

say that there is a “revolution” in his life when he is converted to Christ.

While true conversion is crucial to salvation, one should never seek to downplay the importance of baptism. Most people in protestant denominationalism tend to do this very thing, and faithful members of the Lord’s body are found defending the very thing taught in God’s word. Baptism remits sin (Acts 2:38). Baptism saves a person (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism washes sins away and is the means by which one “calls upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

These things having been said, we have some people in the Lord’s body who have merely gotten wet and have not been converted to New Testament Christianity. There is more to living a godly life than just being bap-

tized. Some are under the assumption that all they had to do was be baptized without any expectation of living the life of a servant.

The fact of the matter is that scripture is replete with passages that teach the necessity of conversion. Acts 28:27 says, “For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” These words are spoken to the Jews who have been given audience to Paul upon his arrival to Rome. Some of the Israelites who heard Paul believed him, and some did not. These unbelievers are the ones who have a heart that is dull, ears that are hard of hearing, and eyes that are closed.

Conversely, those converted to Christ are people who have opened their hearts, opened their eyes, and open their ears to the proclamation of God’s message. Those truly converted are the ones who respond to the message of the New Testament by taking action. One must be a hearer and doer of the word to truly be a disciple of Jesus. James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

In all honesty, we have too many people who are merely warming a pew. While church attendance is important, it is not at the pinnacle of

Christian responsibility. No person was ever complimented by an inspired writer for church attendance. They were complemented for being a fellow laborer in Christ. For being a worker in the church, Paul had the highest regard and praise.

Peter summed up the major responsibility of all Christians. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Those in Christ have been chosen by God to make intercession on behalf of Christ. That is, we entreat others to become children of God by the proclamation of the gospel. This cannot be done by people who feel no responsibility towards the lost or no urgency to teach individuals who are lost and dying in sin.

Moreover, conversion means that a person is very sensitive to the power of sin. Unlike some of the brethren at Rome, we need to avoid sin. Romans 6:1-2 says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Some people who are baptized show no real change in their lives after they arise from the waters of baptism. There needs to be a revolution in the lives of people who would desire to live a Christian life. Paul points this out in the very same chapter in verses eleven and

twelve. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

This might best be underscored by those who obeyed the gospel at Ephesus. Notice how they responded to the message of Jesus. Acts 19:19-20 says, “Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men*: and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” These newly converted Christians understood that their “curious arts” were not consistent with their profession of Christ, and they burned books valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver! What did you give up to follow Jesus?

In further consideration of these verses in Acts nineteen, one might consider verse twenty in particular. “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” The word of God had a leavening effect upon all those who witnessed the conversion of these soothsayers, sorcerers, and charlatans. These people burned the sources of their unsavory financial gain. From these passages, one learns that the word of God is powerful when it falls into fertile ground. It has the ability to forever alter a person’s life.

Evidently, the Corinthian church understood that conversion meant giving up former sinful practices. Paul lists every sin imaginable when he discusses their former manner of living. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Instead of arguing for the “right” to continue sinful behaviors, these brethren forsook their sins, repented, were “washed,” and lived a sanctified life. Wouldn’t it be good if people in our age responded to the gospel in the same way?

We must be converted to have eternal life. Acts 3:19 says, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” God’s people should seek to be as innocent and as blameless as a little child. Matthew 18:3 “... Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Why Do Liberals Stay among Us?

Hugh Fulford

If the church of Christ is just another denomination beset with as many sins, shortcomings, failures, and uninformed views as the leftist/progressive members of it say that it is why do they not leave it for “a different denomination,” a better and more perfect one, or at least one that is more in keeping with their views?

If loyal churches of Christ are behind the times because they refuse to adopt instrumental music in the worship of the church, utilize women preachers, admit to being a denomination, or accept as members those who have not been immersed for the remission of sins (or some biblically synonymous reason), etc. why do the leftists stay?

If the church is out of step on matters pertaining to race (though I cannot name a single congregation anywhere that does not welcome people of all races, with many of them having a racially integrated leadership of elders, deacons, and ministers), is out of step with reference to the Old Testament and its relation to the New Testament, is out of step concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage, is out of step regarding sexual identity and same-sex relationships, etc. why do the progressives stay?

I will tell you why they stay. They have succeeded in capturing some of

the larger, more affluent congregations in various parts of the country. They have succeeded in capturing several of the once faithful Christian universities. They will not be satisfied until they have shipwrecked the faith (1 Timothy 1:18-20) of as many other Christians, congregations, and colleges as they can.

They stay because they see themselves as the “saviors” of the church of Christ. They see the church as narrow and sectarian and they are out to reform it. Some of the preachers among them can write of nothing other than why the churches ought to have instrumental music and women preachers, why they should stop insisting on the necessity of immersion for the remission of sins, and why they should acknowledge that the church is a denomination! They are ashamed of the church in its allegiance to the simple New Testament way, and they desire to change it to make it more in step with the culture around it and the denominational churches that men have established.

They contend that all who believe in Jesus, regardless of whether they have been immersed for the remission of sin and regardless of doctrinal differences and worship practice differences, are members of the one body of Christ. They seem to think that no false doctrines or practices have arisen

since the close of the New Testament, and that the New Testament in its first century context does not address any false doctrines or unscriptural practices that may possibly exist today. They seem to think that the Bible should not be used to address and refute any doctrine or practice that may be considered contrary to the Scriptures.

One of their number, in responding to another who was giving book, chapter, and verse in refutation of a particular doctrine, condescendingly asked, “Are you reading the Bible or just quoting verses?” They do not like book, chapter, and verse preaching, and often charge those who do that kind of preaching with “proof-texting.” They think that they and they alone know how to correctly read the Bible!

Their view of how the Scriptures are to be handled allows for wide doctrinal differences and beliefs and for great variety of worship practices. They “read” the Bible in such a way as for all who profess faith in Christ (regardless of doctrine and practice) to be acceptable to God, and foolishly assert that all who believe in Jesus are already united in Him, in spite of their many obvious differences! And these are only some of the more “visible” issues that the progressives are championing.

Their doctrine is contrary to the sound doctrine of the New Testament. The “faith” they espouse is not the “one faith” of the New Testament for

which loyal Christians are to earnestly contend (Ephesians 4:5; Philippians 1:27-28; Jude 3). As one highly respected leader among God’s faithful people said to me not long ago (speaking of the liberals among us), “Their ‘faith’ is a different faith than ours.” They parade as churches of Christ but they are not churches of the New Testament faith and order. The sooner the rest of us recognize them for who they are the better off we will be (see Romans 16:17-18). Most informed brethren have already done so.

To the credit and integrity of progressives and liberals of the past, they went to the digressive Christian Church or left to join the Disciples of Christ, the Methodists, the Episcopalians, the Catholics, or various other denominational churches. I have a whole lot more respect for them than I do for the lack of integrity characteristic of those who now stay, “worm” their way into congregations, gatherings of preachers, Bible departments of Christian schools and universities, and other venues, and corrupt the faith of others, “beguiling unstable souls” (2 Peter 2:14). The liberals and leftists in the church today do not have the kind of integrity that will permit them to leave.



Keeping Jesus' Commandments

Owen Olbricht

Giving commandments is Jesus's part; our part is keeping them. We are not asked to agree with them. We are asked to teach and obey them. When Jesus sent the apostles to preach to all the world, He told them to teach those they baptized "to observe all I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus' commandments have been written for us by inspired men, like Paul, who wrote, "the commandments I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). John concluded the book of Revelation by writing, "blessed are those who do His commandments" (Revelation 22:14). Instead of blessing us, Jesus will take vengeance on us if we do not obey (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Obey All Commandments

Obeying the commandments means keeping "all" of them (Matthew 28:20). We are not to pick and choose which commandments we will obey. Paul wrote, "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples" (Romans 2:22). Just because a person hated idols did not give him the right to rob temples. Obeying the commandments we like does not give us license to fail to observe the ones we do not like.

As I was leaving an area where we knocked doors in a campaign, I drove to pick up a couple of workers. One was a young man who was a college

student and the girl was in high school. They were tightly embraced and were kissing while standing on one of the downtown street corners. I confronted them. "I cannot believe you were kissing in the open public on a street corner." He replied, "This is one of my weaknesses. I do well with all the other commandments."

He seemed to think it was all right to violate one commandment because he kept all the others. It does not work that way. Paul admonished, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1). James wrote, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, He is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Keep All Included in Each Commandment

Keeping a commandment requires observing all of it, and not just keeping a part of it. This is what was expected of Saul in response to God's instruction.

Samuel gave Saul God's word, "...utterly destroy all that they (the Amalekites) have, and do not spare them" (1 Samuel 15:3). Saul destroyed all but the king, and let the people keep the best of the Amalekite's belongings. Saul told Samuel that he had "obeyed the voice of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:26).

Saul and the people had obeyed most of what God commanded, but they failed to keep all. Samuel told him, "...you have rejected the word of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:23).

Keeping a part of God's commandment is not enough. Keeping only a part is "rebellion (1 Samuel 15:23). Are we rebelling when we attend some of the gatherings of the church, and not all of them (Heb. 10:25)? Is keeping some but not all the traffic laws rebellion (1 Pet. 2:13)? What else do members do that is only a part of a commandment?

Not Add to Commandments

Not only are we not to diminish what is included in a commandment, but we are not to add to what is included. Jesus told the apostles to teach those they baptized "...to observe all I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). "Observe *all*" is inclusive and restrictive. If a person has added to what Jesus commanded and observing it, he is not keeping what Jesus commanded, but is observing what Jesus has not commanded.

Moses did this. When God told him to speak to the rock, he added to what God told him to do, and struck the rock two times, thus he did something God had not commanded, and he did not give God credit for the water that came from the rock. Because of this God did not permit him to enter the promised land (Num. 20:7-12). Adding to what God said may seem like a small thing, but with God it is

going beyond what He requires, which is written in Scripture (1 Corinthians 4:6), and doing what He has not commanded.

Obey What We Can

God requires of us to do what we are able to do, and not what we are unable to do. This principle governs everything that is required of us. Paul wrote about our giving, "...it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what at he does not have" (2 Corinthians 8:12). This principle can be found in the parable of the talents; each man had to give account for the money given to him (Mathew 25:14-30). Each of them was expected to serve with what he was given to him according to his ability to use it. God does not require of us what we do not have and what we are unable to do.

A person is not expected to give if he has no money, or to attend if he is in the hospital and cannot be released. If someone cannot talk to confess his faith in Jesus, a hand sign or nod of the head can be his confession instead of a confession with his mouth (Romans 10:10). God expects us to obey to the fullest with what we have and with what we can do. We are not held accountable for what we do not have and what we cannot do.

Conclusion

We are required to observe all Jesus commanded in all areas where Jesus has given commandments. It is

wrong for us to add to or take away from what He has commanded (Deut. 4:2), for His every word is pure (Pro. 30:5, 6). Just as with pure water, if we

add or take anything away from it, we contaminate it. God forbid that we should teach and practice a contaminated Word of God.

Shepherd Leadership in the Scriptures

Andy Erwin

In the Old Testament, the verb of “shepherd” (*raah*) is translated to pasture, tend, feed, lead, and keep the flock.¹ The verb can also represent the entire job of a shepherd. A “shepherd” is simply a feeder or tender of sheep.²

In the New Testament, the verbs *bosko* and *poimaino* are translated to feed, herd, and to tend as a shepherd.³ Again, the entirety of the work can be represented in this word. Accordingly, a “shepherd” (*poimen*) is likewise one who herds or tends sheep.⁴

Shepherds were providers, guides, protectors, and constant companions of sheep. Sheep were totally dependent on shepherds for protection, rescuing, grazing, watering, shelter, and

tending to injuries. Without a caring shepherd, sheep would not have lived long in the ancient world.

Using the shepherd as a metaphor, the shepherd leader concept in the Old Testament begins with God. He is depicted as a Shepherd to Israel (Gen. 48:15; Gen. 49:24).⁵ Throughout the Old Testament, God is shown leading His flock (Ps. 31:3). He leads out of love (Exod. 15:13),⁶ and goes before them (Ps. 68:7), driving out the enemy to make room for His own flock (Ps. 78:52–55).

The Shepherd Psalm (Ps. 23) depicts God as a personal Shepherd (v.1) who leads His sheep to pastures and waters (v.2), while protecting them with His rod and staff (v.4), even restoring them to health (v.3). He also gathers His sheep (Isa. 56:8) and carries them in His bosom to safety (Isa. 40:11; cf. Ps. 28:9). As Shepherd over His flock, God is presented guiding (Deut. 26:5–8; Ps. 77:20; 80:1), pro-

¹ William L. Holliday, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 342.

² William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 388.

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, edited by Fredrick William Danker, third edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 842.

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 843.

⁵ For more Old Testament depictions of God acting as a shepherd, see Ps. 79:13; Ps. 80:1; Ps. 95:7; Ps. 100:3; Isa. 63:11; Mic. 7:14; Zech. 9:16.

⁶ On one occasion God is viewed as shepherding with anger (Ps. 74:1).

tecting (Ps. 78:52), saving (Ezek. 34:22), leading (Jer. 50:19; Mic. 2:12, 13), keeping careful watch over (Jer. 31:10; Ps. 121:4), and caring for His flock (Zech. 10:3).

During Israel's Old Testament history God did not merely serve as a Shepherd who led by example. To the contrary, He actively directed His flock in paths of righteousness (Ps. 23:3). God served as leader, protector, and ruler for Israel.⁷ God led according to His core attributes of righteousness, holiness, justice, and love. God's reputation among the nations depended upon the standards of the people

⁷ In many ancient kingdoms the shepherd metaphor also symbolized a ruler's relationship with his people. Rulers were described as demonstrating their legitimacy to rule by their ability to "pasture" their people. Hammurabi and many other rulers of ancient western Asia are called "shepherd" or described as "pasturing" their subjects. Cyrus of Persia is also depicted as God's shepherd who would drive the flock from their homeland (Isa. 44:28–45:1; cf. Jer. 23:8). This metaphor is also used with regard to armies and their commanders (1 Kings 22:17; Jer. 6:3). However, no ruling king in Israel or Judah is known to have directly borne this title. For information pertaining to the use of the shepherd metaphor in antiquity, see R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 853; Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 58–74; Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 6: 487–8.

who bore His name.⁸ He sought to remove wicked influences from the flock He pastured (Zech.11:7). The goals, vision, and work of the flock were derived from His leadership, while being executed through their participation in His plan. God sought to encourage the spiritual transformation of His people through their participation and the mutual relationship developed through experienced faith and reward.

God began the practice of utilizing "under shepherds"⁹ to look after the needs of His vulnerable flock (cf. 2 Sam. 23:3–4).¹⁰ Moses and Aaron are depicted as shepherds over the flock (Ps. 77:20; Isa. 63:11). God did not want Israel to as sheep without a shepherd upon their deaths, and thus He appointed Joshua to shepherd leadership (Num. 27:16–21). The Judges followed in this capacity (2 Sam. 7:7). David then served God and His flock as a shepherd king (2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Chron. 11:2; Ps. 78:70–72).¹¹

God's desire was to give His flock shepherds after His own heart to feed them with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15). Yet, contrasted against

⁸ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 111.

⁹ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 53.

¹⁰ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 40.

¹¹ Although is designated a shepherd by God, no ruling king in Israel or Judah is known to have officially borne this title from the people. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 6: 487–8.

the faithful “under shepherds” provided by God were unfaithful leaders (shepherds) who transgressed the law of God (Jer. 2:8), and influenced the people to do likewise (Jer. 10:21; 12:10; 22:22; 23:1–2; 25:34–38; 50:6–7). The most infamous recounting of their wicked rule over God’s flock is found in Ezekiel 34:1–10.

One of the reasons why God needed Ezekiel to serve as a watchman for His people was because the men who were supposed to be doing that job were negligent. The Lord addressed this issue by asking, “Should not shepherds feed the flock?” (Ezekiel 34:2) It was not because there was a shortage of food that the flock was not being feed. The shepherds of the flock were fat and clothed (v.3), and were feeding themselves (v.10). However, they were not true caretakers of the flock. As a result, the flock was scattered as sheep without a shepherd (v. 5; cf. Zech. 10:2).

The rulers behaved like owners rather than hired servants. They became hirelings and thieves. The shepherds of Israel were not concerned with strengthening the weak, ministering to the sick and broken, bringing back those who had been driven away, or seeking the lost (Ezek. 34:3–4). Instead of functioning as godly and faithful keepers of the flock, they drove away the flock by ruling them with force and harshness (Ezek. 34:4).

The health and multiplication of a community was a sign of good leader-

ship.¹² The condition and growth of a flock depends greatly on the care, attentiveness, and skill of the shepherd.¹³ Responsible shepherds would know every member if their flocks in terms of their birth circumstances, history of health, eating habits, and other idiosyncrasies.¹⁴ Yet, the result of this failed leadership was a people “scattered because there was no shepherd” (Ezek. 34:5).

The Lord said, “My sheep were scattered over the whole face of the earth, with no one to seek or search for them” (Ezek. 34:6). The shepherds of His people were negligent, irresponsible, and careless with the sacred work they had in overseeing God’s flock.

God unequivocally states: “I am against the shepherds” (Ezek. 34:10). Due to the negligence of the false shepherds of Israel, God would take the matter into His hands to seek and save the lost (Ezek. 34:11), to feed, water, and rest His flock (Ezek. 34:13 ff.), to bind the injured and strengthen the weak, and to destroy the wicked shepherds (Ezek. 34:16; cf. Zech. 11:7).

The Old Testament prophets look ahead to a time when God would rescue His flock from the nations to which they were scattered (Ezek. 34:11 ff.), returning them to their homeland from captivity (Isa. 11:11;

¹² Laniak, 51.

¹³ Laniak, 53.

¹⁴ Laniak, 57.

Jer. 23:3; Mic. 5:3; Zech. 10:3 ff.). Israel was in need of spiritual transformation and God would pour out upon them the “Spirit of grace and supplication” (Zech. 12:10) corresponding to a fountain being opened for sin and impurity (Zech. 13:1).¹⁵ Israel was in need of greater understanding and assurance of God’s capacity for forgiveness, to which the prophets speak with unanimity (Isa. 55:6–9; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25; 37:23).

The Lord promised to establish one Shepherd over Israel (Mic. 5:4; Zech. 11:16). The Shepherd would be from the line of David (Isa. 11:1 ff.; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23; Ezek. 37:24; Zech. 12:1–13:1).

While being the Lord’s Servant (Ezek. 34:23), the Shepherd would also be “prince among them” (Ezek. 34:24). Israel would be one nation again, with one king (Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 37:22–24). The “Ruler” would be born in Bethlehem, although He has existed from eternity (Mic. 5:2).

The Spirit of the Lord would be upon Him and He would Shepherd with wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, while judging in righteousness (Isa. 11:1–5; cf. Ezek. 34:17).

¹⁵ Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr., and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 292.

The Shepherd Servant would establish a new covenant between God and Israel, ensuring the ultimate forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 34:25; Ezek. 37:26), and establishing peace between God and man (Mic. 5:5; Isa. 9:6 ff.). The Shepherd would eventually become King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), after first being stricken by the people (Zech. 13:7), and for the people (Isa. 53:4 ff.).

The writers of the New Testament make clear that the Shepherd to whom the prophets pointed was Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus check all the boxes pertaining to the fulfillment of these prophecies,¹⁶ He also exhibits the most admirable traits of a shepherd leader in the image of the Father (see Heb. 1:3).

Jesus was a constant companion to the flock, especially the twelve disciples.¹⁷ He sought to find the lost sheep that had been scattered (Matt. 10:6; Matt. 15:24; Luke 19:10; cf. Jer. 23:4, 5; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2 ff.). He was a shepherd to sheep who had none (Matt. 2:6; Mark 6:34). He shepherded out of compassion (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34; cf. Ex. 15:13). He was a friend to His flock (John 15:13–15),

¹⁶ For further reading about the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies see J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 645–650.

¹⁷ So much was Jesus the constant companion to His flock that Matthew gives special notice of when He was not among them (cf. Matt. 14:13, 23).

which consisted also of publicans and sinners (Matt. 11:19). His goal as Shepherd is to lead the flock to springs of the water of life where God will wipe every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:7), realizing that He would have to be stricken (cf. Zech. 13:7; Isa. 53:5, 8), and lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:17), that they might live (John 10:27–28).

Pursuant to the shepherd imagery of Christ over the flock is the imagery of under-shepherds to follow His example in caring for the church. Just as the Father did not want Israel to be left as sheep without a shepherd upon the death of Moses (Num. 27:17), Christ did not want the church to be left without pastoral care upon His ascension to His throne in heaven (Acts 20:28–29; cf. Jer. 23:4).

The first example to consider is Peter and the entrusted responsibility to feed the sheep (John 21:15–17). Peter’s work of feeding centered upon teaching and preaching, or “the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). While tasked with feeding the flock and granted a measure of authority, the apostles continued to view Christ as the Chief Shepherd and supreme Overseer of the church (1 Pet. 2:25; 1 Pet. 5:4; Heb. 13:20). The apostles recognized their work was to serve as humble stewards of the flock and the work entrusted to their care (1 Pet. 4:10–11; 1 Cor. 4:1, 6). Sometimes the apostles were even required to shepherd one another, as was the case with Paul and Peter regarding fellowship

between Jewish and Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:11–14).

Just as Jesus received the work of shepherding from His Father, He handed over the task to Peter and the rest of the apostles. Peter then passed along the function of shepherd leader to elders in the churches. To ensure faithful nurturing, guidance, and protection for the flock, the Lord gave qualifications and stipulations for shepherd leaders in every congregation (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Just as Jesus was a constant companion to the twelve, elders are to remain among the flock (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Pet. 5:2), caring for, encouraging, and guiding the church. Yet, the shepherd’s ongoing challenge was teaching the flock to obey the Lord’s commands.

A shepherd leader directs the flock and helps the flock to navigate a faithful course in the world, determining direction for the flock, while following the lead of the Good Shepherd. As shepherd leaders follow the example of Christ, the church follows them (1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). But, just as Christ did not lead by example *only* (cf. John 14:15; John 15:10), elders are not to lead *only* by example. The flock is commanded to obey and submit to those who are watching over their souls (Heb. 13:17). The elders have been entrusted with “charge” over the flock (1 Thess. 5:12). If the shepherd leaders are faithful in communicating the word of God, the flock must obedient-

ly follow them as they follow Christ (cf. Phil. 4:9).

The shepherd leader is a servant leader who oversees the flock as a voluntary service to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), hoping to protect the sheep from harm. His interest is not in lording over the flock (1 Pet. 5:3), like the wicked shepherds from the prophets or from the ministry of Christ. He *serves* because it is his desire to serve and to teach those whom he leads to be servants as well. By serving the flock, the shepherd is imitating the shepherd leadership of Christ (cf. Mark 10:43-45).

Shepherd leaders are active participants in the ministry serving as models of proper behavior and desires.¹⁸ Such leaders are desirous to see their flock involved in the ministry and mission of Christ and to use their talents and abilities to fulfill their respective ministries and thereby bring glory to God.

The desire to see the spiritual maturity and health of the flock realized prompts the development of relationship, discipleship, and biblical education. Sheep become transformed as they come to mimic the faith of the shepherd. Through ongoing discipleship and a constant state of spiritual mindedness, the sheep are transformed and develop the mind of

Christ. Shepherds must lead the flock to an environment conducive to encouragement and edification, both individually and collectively. In such an environment spiritual growth will be achieved and numerical growth will occur (Eph. 4:11). The flock will be safe and multiply.

From Father to Son, Son to apostles, apostles to elders, elders must also encourage shepherd leadership among the flock. There is a point to which every Christian is called to provide pastoral care to one another, which is borne out in the numerous one another passages of the New Testament.

The mutual edification of the body of Christ consists of love, encouragement, forgiveness, fellowship, teaching, and care. Each of these actions should be considered aspects of healthy shepherd leadership. Various relationships within the flock will also require direction and guidance to come from one another (see Titus 2:1-8).

Each Christian should desire to be a shepherd leader when the situation calls for it, looking unto the example of the elders of the congregation, and ultimately Christ as the “Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.”



¹⁸ Gregory E. Lamb, “Saint Peter as ‘Sympresbyteros’: Mimetic Desire, Discipleship, and Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (2018): 203.

Remembering Al Franks

Andy Erwin



(1939-2019)

Alfred L. "Al" Franks passed away on Wednesday, October 16, 2019. He was born January 3, 1939 in Louisiana. He will likely be remembered by brethren at large as the fine editor of the *Magnolia Messenger*. He will be remembered by his surviving family as a loving husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. At the time of his death, he and June had three Bible studies ongoing. One study was with his granddaughter and her husband.

A Preacher

"Brother Al," as I called him, made his first "Bible talk" when he was nine years old at his home congregation of Boxwood in Merryville, LA. The congregation gave weekly opportunities for the young boys and men to speak. Al took advantage of the opportunities that were provided and began making talks almost every week. His school's principal would

even allow Al out of school every Thursday to study Bible.

By the time he was 16, he was preaching regularly for the Bilbo & Roberts St. congregation in DeRidder, LA. The fulltime work enabled him to rent a house and marry his sweetheart, June Pearson of Tupelo, MS. He was 17 and she was 16. They were married 63 years! As a young lady, June dreamed of marrying a preacher, and being useful in the church. Anyone who knows her will say that she fulfilled this dream.

Brother Al went on to preach for 70 years. He preached fulltime at such places as Mayfield in Slatton, MS, where he was the congregation's first fulltime preacher, beginning in January 1957. He preached at Skyline in Tupelo, MS, Yazoo City (twice); Rolling Fork, Poplar Springs in Clarksburg, TN, and South Huntington St. Church of Christ, Kosciusko MS.

Brother Al left Yazoo city to focus on his education at Harding's Graduate School of Religion. He and Kelby Smith drove to Memphis for classes in 1960-61. Brother Al then enrolled at Freed Hardeman College in 1964-65. His education is extremely unique as he took classes in graduate school first.

At South Huntington

Brother Al will forever be linked with the South Huntington Street congregation in Kosciusko. He and June moved their family to Kosciusko in 1971. He preached for the congregation until 1978 and served as elder twice. At the time of his death, he was serving as an elder.

Brother Al left fulltime work at South Huntington Street to help start churches in Forest, MS, Crystal Springs, MS, and Meridian, MS. His goal was to be a missionary in Mississippi and to begin churches in counties without a church of Christ.

A historic merger happened in January of 2018 as the black and white congregations came together in Kosciusko. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless this union.

Magnolia Bible College and Magnolia Bible Institute

Al was a supporter of Magnolia Bible College (1976-2009). He served on the Board of Directors at the time of its closing. The property was deeded to the South Huntington church and one of brother Al's greatest concerns was their stewardship of these facilities. He was bothered by seeing these buildings not being used.

As a result, Al was instrumental in beginning the Magnolia Bible Institute in 2018. Evening classes meet throughout the year and the possibilities for good are very exciting. MBI, like MBC, started with a dream.

The *Magnolia Messenger*

In 1978, Al started the *Magnolia Messenger*. He thanked God every day that he was able to do this work. This paper currently has a circulation of over 31,000 readers. It is freely given to those who request it. Al paid for the paper by sending one request letter each year at year's end.

The paper will continue to be printed. Those who love and support it should continue to do so now more than ever.

Some Personal Observations

To know Al Franks is to love him. He was a great encourager to his brethren and to all men. He encouraged others to love and serve the Lord. He inspired humility in others by his humble nature. He was not one who liked to criticize. He looked for good in others and sought to help others realize their potential for good by serving God. One never had to question whether or not Al's heart was in the right place. He was sincere and genuine.

It saddens us when good men are removed from us. But, let us take comfort to know that God remains to strengthen and to bless His people.



What Held Jesus to the Cross?

Matthew 27: 39-44

Introduction:

1. “If...” sounds like the Devil talking to Jesus. Matthew 4:3, 6
2. Jesus could have called in the angels. Matthew 26:53, 54
3. Why did Jesus not save himself? What held him to the cross?

I. His Resignation to the Father’s Will.

- A. “But how shall the scripture be fulfilled.” Isaiah 53:7
- B. His desire was to please the Father. Philippians 2:6-9
- C. Let God’s will be our will as well. Matthew 7:21-23

II. His Matchless Love for Mankind.

- A. Love, the nature of God. 1 John 4:8; Romans 5:8
- B. Jesus, God in the Flesh. John 1:1, 14; Romans 8:35-39
- C. Love was His nature as well. Galatians 2:20

III. His Divine Hatred for Sin.

- A. God hates all sin. Proverbs 6:16-19
- B. Every accountable person has the sin problem. Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8; 5:19
- C. The cross is the only answer for justification.

IV. His Anticipation of Reunion with the Father.

- A. Jesus had a desire to go home. John 17:3-5
- B. The joy enabled endurance. Hebrews 12:1, 2
- C. Heaven is a place of rejoicing. Luke 15:5-7

V. Our Sins—Yours and Mine.

- A. He was sinless. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15
- B. Without the cross is to be without hope. Ephesians 2:12-16
- C. The cross shows us how ugly our sins really are.

Conclusion:

1. Jesus could not save himself and be our savior as well!
2. We need to die as well to be raised with Him. Romans 6:1-6

-Mike Kiser

Remembering R. W. Comer

James R. McGill

R. W. Comer (1860-1944) was born in the little town of Gamaliel in Monroe County in central Kentucky, just north of the Tennessee border. The village was named after the apostle Paul's famous teacher mentioned in Acts 5:34 and Acts 22:3.

After finishing high school Comer attended Burritt College in Spencer, Tennessee, a noted Christian college east of Nashville.

He next went into business, opening a store in Glasgow, Kentucky, before spending some time as a traveling salesman in north-central Tennessee.

The Move to Nashville

Then, at the beginning of the 20th Century, at age forty, he made the last move of his life, to Nashville, where he founded the immensely successful Washington Manufacturing Company. He specialized in the manufacture of work clothing. He had factories in Kentucky and Tennessee with a central shipping house in Nashville.

Comer was active in the Russell Street church of Christ, located on the east side of downtown Nashville. He became one of the elders.

In 1911, seeing the need for a congregation in the Chapel Avenue area, farther out from downtown, he took the lead in buying a small building in that location, where they began meeting.

Not long afterward, he again led in establishing the Chapel Avenue Home for the Aged. The principles on which

the home was based were those named in the New Testament: That the residents would be (1) Christian widows, (2) at least sixty years of age (1 Timothy 5:9,10) and who (3) had no family members to care for them (1 Timothy 5:16).

Some exceptions were made. For example, at least one elderly never-married Christian lady was accepted. There was another lady, under age sixty, with a special need, who was taken in. The home for the aged was just across from the church building. It included a small auditorium for the ladies to assemble for worship. In addition, all the services of the Chapel Avenue church were broadcast to the home by means of a line across the street. In each lady's room there was a speaker that she could turn on if she desired to tune in to the services at the church building. Ladies who were physically able attended the Chapel Avenue worship regularly.

Comer held solid values, morally and doctrinally, in his personal life and in his preaching. One illustration he used is unforgettable. He said, "When I am walking downtown past a movie theater, and I look into the ticket window, what I see is not a nicely dressed, well-groomed lady selling tickets. What I see is the devil himself!"

The Comer Foundation

R. W. Comer prospered greatly in business. He used his wealth to do all he could to save souls. He took care never to advertise his giving. He de-

voted much of the last ten years of his life to establish a foundation that would provide for gospel preachers in need and destitute fields of endeavor even after his death.

When he died, the many support checks continued to go out in response to needs in America and in foreign lands. That was done quietly. I got a little insight into this good work since my daddy worked in Comer's Washington Manufacturing Company post office from which the letters went out each month to so many places in need.

Every December, R. W. Comer gave gifts to all his workers. One year, for example, he special-ordered 2,500 beautiful leather-bound Bibles to give to his employees. Besides gifts of candy, shirts, etc., the workers all often received a gift book. The company even acquired a printing facility for this purpose.

One year they would give a volume of sermons by Foy E. Wallace, Jr. At another time it would be a volume of N. B. Hardeman sermons. One gift my father received there was a New Testament with his name engraved in gold lettering. On the inside front cover is this message: "REMEMBER: The greatest thing in all the world is the salvation offered to man by God through Jesus Christ."

N. B. Hardeman preached in five area-wide gospel meeting series in Nashville between 1922 and 1942. All five volumes of sermons were printed. In Volume 4 Hardeman wrote this dedication:

"To R. W. Comer...who, probably, was more responsible for the meetings

in which these sermons were preached than any other man, and whose devotion to the 'old paths' is ever a source of inspiration—to him, my friend and benefactor, this volume is sincerely dedicated."

Comer's Funeral

At Comer's funeral it was said of him: "His greatest concern was the need to impress all with the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ as God's Son, repenting of their sins, confessing His name, and being buried in baptism for the remission of sins, and then rising to walk in newness of life."

The editor of *The Nashville Banner*, Nashville's afternoon daily newspaper, wrote: "A true Christian gentleman has passed this way, and in passing left his stamp upon those countless lives he touched. Because personal modesty was a major attribute of Mr. R. W. Comer, he lived and served... without ostentation... He was a follower of the Golden Rule in business as in private life."

N. B. Hardeman, speaking at R. W. Comer's funeral, thinking of the times they had been together at Chapel Avenue, said of him: "I can never forget how he sat over there and took such an active part in singing. I loved to hear him lead the prayer which he always began, 'Our dear, loving heavenly Father....'"

R. W. Comer died August 5, 1944. He was 84.

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